

A  
LETTER  
TO A  
YOUNG LADY,  
ON HER  
MARRIAGE

*Written in the YEAR 1723.*

MADAM,

The Hurry and Impertinence of receiving and paying Visits on Account of your Marriage, being now over; you are beginning to enter into a Course of Life, where you will want much Advice to divert you from falling into many Errors, Fopperies, and Follies to which your Sex is subject. I have always born an entire Friendship to your Father and Mother; and the Person they have chosen for your Husband hath been for some Years past my particular Favourite. I have long wished you might come together, because I hoped, that from the Goodness of your Disposition, and by following the Council of wise Friends, you might in Time make your self worthy of him. Your Parents were so far in the right, that they did not produce you much into the World; whereby you avoided many wrong Steps which others have taken; and have fewer ill Impressions to be removed: But they failed, as it is generally the Case, in too much neglecting to cultivate your Mind; without which it is impossible to acquire or preserve the Friendship and Esteem of a wise Man, who soon grows weary of acting the Lover, and treating his Wife like a Mistress, but wants a reasonable Companion, and a true Friend through every Stage of his Life. It must be therefore your Business to qualify your self for those Offices; wherein I will not fail to be your Director as long as I shall think you deserve it, by letting you know how you are to act, and what you ought to avoid.

AND beware of despising or neglecting my Instructions, whereon will depend, not only your making a good Figure in the World, but your own real Happiness, as well as that of the Person who ought to be the dearest to you.

I MUST therefore desire you in the first place to be very slow in changing the modest Behaviour of a Virgin: It is usual in young Wives before they have been many Weeks married, to assume a bold, forward Look and manner of Talking; as if they intended to signify in all Companies, that they were no longer Girls, and consequently that their whole Demeanor, before they got a Husband, was all but a Countenance and Constraint upon their Nature: Whereas, I suppose, if the Votes of wise Men were gathered, a very great Majority would be in favour of those Ladies, who after they were entered into that State, rather chose to double their Portion of Modesty and Reservedness.

I MUST likewise warn you strictly against the least Degree of Fondness to your Husband before any Witnesses whatsoever, even before your nearest Relations, or the very Maids of your Chamber. This Proceeding is so extremely odious and disgusting to all who have either good Breeding or good Sense, that they assign two very unamiable Reasons for it; the one is gross Hypocrisy, and



the other hath too bad a Name to mention. If there is any Difference to be made, your Husband is the lowest Person in Company, either at home or abroad; and every Gentleman present hath a better Claim to all Marks of Civility and Distinction from you. Conceal your Esteem and Love in your own Breast, and reserve your kind Looks and Language for private Hours; which are so many in the Four and Twenty, that they will afford Time to employ a Passion as exalted as any that was ever described in a *French* Romance.

UPON this Head, I should likewise advise you to differ in Practice from those Ladies who affect abundance of Uneasiness while their Husbands are abroad; start with every knock at the Door, and ring the Bell incessantly for their Servants to let in their Master; will not eat a Bit at Dinner or Supper if the Husband happen to stay out; and receive him at his Return with such a Medley of Chiding and Kindness, and catechizing him where he hath been; that a Shrew from *Billingsgate* would be a more easy and eligible Companion.

OF the same Leaven are those Wives, who when their Husbands are gone a Journey, must have a Letter every Post, upon Pain of Fits and Hystericks; and a Day must be fixed for their Return home without the least Allowance for Business, or Sickness, or Accidents, or Weather: Upon which, I can only say, that in my Observation, those Ladies, who are apt to make the greatest Clutter upon such occasions, would liberally have paid a Messenger for bringing them News, that their Husbands had broken their Necks on the Road.

YOU will perhaps be offended when I advise you to abate a little of that violent Passion for fine Cloaths so predominant in your Sex. It is somewhat hard, that ours, for whose Sake you wear them, are not admitted to be of your Council: I may venture to assure you, that we will make an Abatement at any Time of four Pounds a Yard in a Brocade, if the Ladies will but allow a suitable Addition of Care in the Cleanliness and Sweetness of their Persons: For, the satirical Part of Mankind will needs believe, that it is not impossible, to be very fine and very filthy; and that the Capacities of a Lady are sometimes apt to fall short in cultivating Cleanliness and Finery together. I shall only add, upon so tender a Subject, what a pleasant Gentleman said concerning a silly Woman of Quality; that nothing could make her supportable but cutting off her Head; for his Ears were offended by her Tongue, and his Nose by her Hair and Teeth.

I AM wholly at a Loss how to advise you in the Choice of Company; which, however, is a Point of as great Importance as any in your Life. If your general Acquaintance be among Ladies who are your Equals or Superiors, provided they have nothing of what is commonly called an ill Reputation, you think you are safe; and this in the Style of the World will pass for good Company. Whereas, I am afraid it will be hard for you to pick out one Female-Acquaintance in this Town, from whom you may not be in manifest Danger of contracting some Foppery, Affectation, Vanity, Folly, or Vice. Your only safe Way

of conversing with them, is by a firm Resolution to proceed in your Practice and Behaviour, directly contrary to whatever they shall say or do: And this I take to be a good general Rule, with very few Exceptions. For Instance, In the Doctrines they usually deliver to young-married Women for managing their Husbands; their several Accounts of their own Conduct in that Particular, to recommend it to your Imitation; the Reflections they make upon others of their Sex for acting differently; their Directions how to come off with Victory upon any Dispute or Quarrel you may have with your Husband; the Arts by which you may discover and practice upon his weak Sides; when to work by Flattery and Insinuation; when to melt him with Tears; and when to engage him with a high Hand. In these, and a thousand other Cases, it will be prudent to retain as many of their Lectures in your Memory as you can, and then determine to act in full Opposition to them all.

I HOPE your Husband will interpose his Authority to limit you in the Trade of Visiting: Half a dozen Fools are in all Conscience as many as you should require; and it will be sufficient for you to see them twice a Year: For I think the Fashion does not exact that Visits should be paid to Friends.

I ADVISE that your Company at home should consist of Men rather than Women. To say the Truth, I never yet knew a tolerable Woman to be fond of her own Sex: I confess, when both are mixt and well chosen, and put their best Qualities forward, there may be an Intercourse of Civility and Good-will; which, with the Addition of some Degree of Sense, can make Conversation or any Amusement agreeable. But a Knot of Ladies, got together by themselves, is a very School of Impertinence and Detraction; and it is well if those be the worst.

LET your Men-Acquaintance be of your Husband's Choice, and not recommended to you by any She-companions; because they will certainly fix a Coxcomb upon you; and it will cost you some Time and Pains before you can arrive at the Knowledge of distinguishing such a one from a Man of Sense.

NEVER take a Favourite-Waiting-Maid into your Cabinet-Council, to entertain you with Histories of those Ladies whom she hath formerly served; of their Diversions and their Dresses; to insinuate how great a Fortune you brought, and how little you are allowed to squander; to appeal to her from your Husband, and to be determined by her Judgment, because you are sure it will be always for you; to receive and discard Servants by her Approbation, or Dislike; to engage you by her Insinuations into Misunderstandings with your best Friends; to represent all Things in false Colours, and to be the common Emissary of Scandal.

BUT, the grand Affair of your Life will be to gain and preserve the Friendship and Esteem of your Husband. You are married to a Man of good Education and Learning, of an excellent Understanding, and an exact Taste. It is true, and it is happy for you, that these Qualities in him are adorned with great



Modesty, a most amiable Sweetness of Temper, and an unusual Disposition to Sobriety and Virtue: But neither Good-nature, nor Virtue, will suffer him to esteem you against his Judgment; and although he be not capable of using you ill, yet you will, in Time, grow a Thing indifferent, and perhaps contemptible, unless you can supply the Loss of Youth and Beauty with more durable Qualities. You have but a very few Years to be young and handsome in the Eyes of the World; and as few Months to be so in the Eyes of a Husband, who is not a Fool; for, I hope, you do not still dream of Charms and Raptures; which Marriage ever did, and ever will put a sudden End to. Besides, yours was a Match of Prudence, and common Good-liking, without any Mixture of that ridiculous Passion which hath no Being, but in Play-Books and Romances.

YOU must, therefore, use all Endeavours to attain to some Degree of those Accomplishments, which your Husband most values in other People, and for which he is most valued himself. You must improve your Mind, by closely pursuing such a Method of Study, as I shall direct or approve of. You must get a Collection of History and Travels, which I will recommend to you; and spend some Hours every Day in reading them, and making Extracts from them, if your Memory be weak. You must invite Persons of Knowledge and Understanding to an Acquaintance with you, by whose Conversation you may learn to correct your Taste and Judgment: And when you can bring yourself to comprehend and relish the good Sense of others, you will arrive, in Time, to think rightly yourself, and to become a reasonable and agreeable Companion. This must produce in your Husband a true rational Love and Esteem for you, which old Age will not diminish. He will have a Regard for your Judgment and Opinion, in Matters of the greatest Weight; you will be able to entertain each other, without a third Person to relieve you, by finding Discourse. The Endowments of your Mind will even make your Person more agreeable to him; and when you are alone, your Time will not lie heavy upon your Hands, for want of some trifling Amusement.

As little Respect as I have for the Generality of your Sex, it hath sometimes moved me with Pity, to see the Lady of the House forced to withdraw, immediately after Dinner, and this in Families where there is not much Drinking; as if it were an established Maxim, that Women are incapable of all Conversation. In a Room where both Sexes meet, if the Men are discoursing upon any general Subject, the Ladies never think it their Business to partake in what passes; but, in a separate Club, entertain each other with the Price and Choice of Lace and Silk, and what Dresses they liked, or disapproved at the Church, or the Playhouse. And when you are among yourselves, how naturally, after the first Compliments, do you apply your Hands to each others Lappets, and Ruffles, and Mantuas; as if the whole Business of your Lives, and the publick Concern of the World, depended upon the Cut or Colour of your Petticoats? As Divines say, that some People take more Pains to be damned, than it would cost them

to be saved; so your Sex employs more Thought, Memory, and Application to be Fools, than would serve to make them wise and useful. When I reflect on this, I cannot conceive you to be human Creatures, but a Sort of Species hardly a Degree above a Monkey; who hath more diverting Tricks than any of you; is an Animal less mischievous and expensive; might, in Time, be a tolerable Critick in Velvet and Brocade; and, for ought I know, would equally become them.

I WOULD have you look upon finery as a necessary Folly, which all great Ladies did whom I have ever known: I do not desire you to be out of the Fashion, but to be the last and least in it: I expect that your Dress shall be one Degree lower than your Fortune can afford: And, in your own Heart, I would wish you to be an utter Contemner of all Distinctions which a finer Petticoat can give you; because, it will neither make you richer, handsomer, younger, better natured, more virtuous, or wise, than if it hung upon a Peg.

IF you are in Company with Men of Learning; although they happen to discourse of Arts and Sciences out of your Compass, yet you will gather more Advantage by listening to them, than from all the Nonsense and Frippery of your own Sex: But, if they be Men of Breeding as well as Learning, they will seldom engage in any Conversation where you ought not to be a Hearer, and in Time have your Part. If they talk of the Manners and Customs of the several Kingdoms of *Europe*; of Travels into remote Nations; of the State of their own Country; or of the great Men and Actions of *Greece* and *Rome*: If they give their Judgment upon *English* and *French* Writers, either in Verse or Prose; or of the Nature and Limits of Virtue and Vice; it is a Shame for an *English* Lady not to relish such Discourses, not to improve by them, and endeavour by Reading and Information, to have her Share in those Entertainments; rather than turn aside, as it is the usual Custom, and consult with the Woman who sits next her, about a new Cargo of Fans.

IT is a little hard, that not one Gentleman's Daughter in a Thousand, should be brought to read, or understand her own Natural Tongue, or be Judge of the easiest Books that are written in it; as any one may find, who can have the Patience to hear them, when they are disposed to mangle a Play or Novel, where the least Word out of the common Road, is sure to disconcert them; and it is no wonder, when they are not so much as taught to spell in their Childhood, nor can ever attain to it in their whole Lives. I advise you, therefore, to read aloud, more or less, every Day to your Husband, if he will permit you, or to any other Friend, (but not a Female one) who is able to set you right: And as for Spelling, you may compass it in Time, by making Collections from the Books you read.

I KNOW very well, that those who are commonly called learned Women, have lost all Manner of Credit by their impertinent Talkativeness, and Conceit of themselves: But there is an easy Remedy for this; if you once consider, that after all the Pains you may be at, you never can arrive, in Point of Learning, to



the Perfection of a School-Boy. But the Reading I would advise you to, is only for Improvement of your own good Sense, which will never fail of being mended by Discretion. It is a wrong Method, and ill Choice of Books, that make those learned Ladies just so much worse for what they have read. And therefore, it shall be my Care to direct you better; a Task for which I take myself to be not ill qualified; because I have spent more Time, and have had more Opportunities than many others, to observe and discover from what Sources the various Follies of Women are derived.

PRAY observe, how insignificant Things are the common Race of Ladies, when they have passed their Youth and Beauty; how contemptible they appear to the Men, and yet more contemptible to the younger Part of their own Sex; and have no Relief but in passing their Afternoons in Visits, where they are never acceptable; and their Evenings at Cards among each other; while the former Part of the Day is spent in Spleen and Envy, or in vain Endeavours to repair by Art and Dress the Ruins of Time: Whereas, I have known Ladies at Sixty, to whom all the polite Part of the Court and Town paid their Addresses; without any further View than that of enjoying the Pleasure of their Conversation.

I AM ignorant of any one Quality that is amiable in a Man, which is not equally so in a Woman: I do not except even Modesty, and Gentleness of Nature. Nor do I know one Vice or Folly, which is not equally detestable in both. There is, indeed, one Infirmary which is generally allowed you, I mean that of Cowardice. Yet there should seem to be something very capricious, that when Women profess their Admiration for a Colonel or a Captain, on Account of his Valour; they should fancy it a very graceful becoming Quality in themselves, to be afraid of their own Shadows; to scream in a Barge, when the Weather is calmest, or in a Coach at the Ring; to run from a Cow at an Hundred Yards Distance; to fall into Fits at the Sight of a Spider, an Ear-wig, or a Frog. At least, if Cowardice be a Sign of Cruelty, (as it is generally granted) I can hardly think it an Accomplishment so desireable, as to be thought worthy of improving by Affectation.

AND as the same Virtues equally become both Sexes; so there is no Quality whereby Women endeavour to distinguish themselves from Men, for which they are not just so much the worse; except that only of Reservedness; which, however, as you generally manage it, is nothing else but Affectation, or Hypocrisy. For, as you cannot too much discountenance those of our Sex, who presume to take unbecoming Liberties before you; so you ought to be wholly unconstrained in the Company of deserving Men, when you have had sufficient Experience of their Discretion.

THERE is never wanting in this Town, a Tribe of bold, swaggering, rattling Ladies, whose Talents pass among Coxcombs for Wit and Humour: Their Excellency lies in rude choquing<sup>1</sup> Expressions, and what they call *running a Man*

*down.* If a Gentleman in their Company, happen to have any Blemish in his Birth, or Person; if any Misfortune hath befallen his Family, or himself, for which he is ashamed; they will be sure to give him broad Hints of it, without any Provocation. I would recommend you to the Acquaintance of a common Prostitute, rather than to that of such Termagants as these. I have often thought that no Man is obliged to suppose such Creatures to be Women; but to treat them like insolent Rascals, disguised in Female Habits, who ought to be stripped, and kicked down Stairs.

I WILL add one Thing, although it be a little out of Place; which is to desire, that you will learn to value and esteem your Husband, for those good Qualities which he really possesseth; and not to fancy others in him, which he certainly hath not. For, although this latter be generally understood for a Mark of Love, yet it is indeed nothing but Affectation, or ill Judgment. It is true, the Person you have chosen wants so very few Accomplishments, that you are in no great Danger of erring on this Side: But my Caution is occasioned by a Lady of your Acquaintance, married to a very valuable Person, whom yet she is so unfortunate as to be always commending for those Perfections, to which he can least pretend.

I CAN give you no Advice upon the Article of Expence; only, I think, you ought to be well informed how much your Husband's Revenue amounts to, and be so good a Computer, as to keep within it, in that Part of the Management which falls to your Share; and not to put yourself in the Number of those politick Ladies, who think they gain a great Point, when they have teased their Husbands to buy them a new Equipage, a laced Head, or a fine Petticoat; without once considering what long Scores remain unpaid to the Butcher.

I DESIRE you will keep this Letter in your Cabinet, and often examine impartially your whole Conduct by it: And so GOD bless you, and make you a fair Example to your Sex, and a perpetual Comfort to your Husband, and your Parents. I am, with great Truth and Affection,

Madam,  
*Your most faithful Friend,*  
*And humble Servant.*